

Buddhist Principles on How to Improve Destiny and Overcome an Unfortunate Life

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Nuns of the [Nanlin Monastery](http://www.nanlin.org) (<http://www.nanlin.org>) — making offerings to Sanghas with strict precepts will yield immediate fruit, altering destiny quickly.

What is fate or destiny?

When each of us were born, a projection of the exact course of our entire life was set in motion, with both our weal and woe scheduled in advance. This projection is the fruit of our karmic balance at birth, and is accurate down to the cent, to each morsel of food we may eat and each gulp of water we may drink. The length of our lifespan, our health, career, who we marry, how much money we can make, our losses and disasters have already been charted into the projection. Thus, our woe and weal has nothing to do with other people or external circumstances, everything is purely the result of past karma. This projection is what we refer to as destiny or fate.

However, we must remember that a projection is only a projection, and is thus ever changing. Our subsequent good and evil from the time of birth onwards alters the projection constantly. However, as most people simply cruise through life, blindly seeking things from the outside, doing negligible good and evil, they remain bound by their original projection, and do not know how to make things work in their favor.

Can fate/destiny be changed in the current life?

It can. In fact, half the purpose of Buddhism is to teach people how to gain happiness by properly managing fate/destiny, and the other half is to teach people how to transcend it altogether by achieving Bodhi, thus gaining true freedom.

According to Zen Master Yun Gu in **Liao Fan's Four Lessons** (one of the most famous recorded cases of a man successfully changing his destiny), fate and destiny cannot bind those who do great good and great evil. This is the key principle behind changing destiny.

Basically, a person destined for poverty and suffering can, through the diligent cultivation of good deeds, turn poverty into prosperity, suffering into happiness and short life into long life. Anything that is sought for — wealth, official positions, honors, children, health and long life — can be attained. On the other hand, those who commit great evil (severe violations of the five precepts and ten good deeds) can cancel out their past life blessings, and turn a projected good life into one of suffering and punishment.

What constitutes great good or great evil?

In general, there are three factors:

- Acts done with persistence, deeds habitually accrued
- Act(s) done with intense mental volition and sincerity
- Act(s) done to a potent merit field (i.e. recipient)

If one (or more) of these factors are in play, then the karma thus created will manifest in the current life, and be powerful enough to change any original fate, for better or for worse.

An example of the **first factor** changing destiny would be the life of Yuan Liao Fan (Ming Dynasty era scholar official during the reign of the Wanli Emperor — author of Liao Fan's Four Lessons). After living the first 35 years of his life exactly as a Taoist priest (Mr. Kong) had predicted using

a method based on the I Ching (originating from the Song Dynasty), he managed to change his fate after vowing to do 3000 good deeds.

Through the persistent routine of discarding bad habits and doing good deeds everyday, he slowly but surely changed his destiny. After a year, he attained the rank of Juren (a honor signifying gentry status he was not originally fated to have). Eventually, over the course of the next decade and half of cultivation, he got everything he wanted — a son, higher honors, long life and finally a high magistracy.

Liao Fan is an example of someone who changed destiny through habitual cultivation of goodness and virtue. This is the slowest of the three factors.

An example of the ***second factor*** changing destiny would be the case of Scholar Yu Jin Yi (a contemporary of Liao Fan). His name, which he changed after turning to goodness, essentially means “correcting intentions and maintaining mental purity”.

Scholar Yu Jin Yi was impoverished by age 47. Though initially destined for success when he passed the first level of imperial examinations at a young age, his life stagnated and declined ever since, becoming beset by various misfortunes such as death of children, son going missing, wife going blind, poverty etc. Eventually, the Hearth Spirit manifested and told him that the reason he did not prosper was because of his **insincerity and hypocrisy**. Though he did some good (as a Confucian scholar, he was essentially the Eastern equivalent of a local vicar in the West), he only did the bare minimum needed for show, was hypocritical/argumentative, and his intentions (being filled with hateful and lustful thoughts) did not live up to how he presented himself.

Thus, he vowed to change, and for the next three years, he walked the path of virtue in body, speech and mind. Bowing before Avalokitesvara with intense sincerity, and doing good deeds without hypocrisy and with true sincerity. Neglecting not even the smallest good deed and tolerating the criticism and misunderstandings of others.

Three years later, he received a response, and was recommended to become the private tutor in the household of the Ming Grand Secretary, Zhang Ju Zheng (1525–1582). This massively elevated his social position. Moreover, he was also reunited with his only surviving son (who had gone missing years before) and his wife's blindness was cured on its own. He lived until his mid eighties.

In the famous Treatise of Response and Retribution (Kan Ying Pien), it is stated that if a person sees only good, does only good and speaks only good for three years, Heaven will bestow fortune. If they do the opposite, Heaven will bestow punishment. Yu Jin Yi, because of his sincerity in walking on the path of virtue in both body and mind, received a response after three years. Moreover, the counterpart scripture to the Kan Yin Pien, the Yin Chih Wen (Lord Superior Wen Chang's Tract of the Quiet Way), stresses that good deeds should be done without seeking reputation. Yu Jin Yi also accorded with this virtue by correcting his previous insincerity and hypocrisy. This is of particular importance since he was a founding member of the Wen Chang Society, and had previously failed to live up to its rules and teachings.

He is an example of someone changing destiny through intense mental volition and sincerity. This is second quickest way to change destiny.

An example of the **third factor** changing destiny would be the case of King Suprabuddha, who maliciously obstructed an alms round by blocking the Buddha's path. His evil karma ripened in seven days and he was swallowed by the ground and fell into Avici Hell (his original good fortune being immediately washed away by this new powerful negative karma). This is because he had committed an evil act against a potent merit field (i.e. The Buddha and Sangha).

In general, a field is potent if it belongs to the following three categories:

- The Buddha, Bodhisattvas, Sutras, Arhats, Sangha of strict precepts etc.
- One's parents and benefactors
- Persons and animals suffering intensely — such as wayfarers, the starving, torture victims, those freezing, lepers, animals about to be

slaughtered, patients with severe or painful illnesses, beings on the verge of great suffering etc.

Any act good or bad, even if small or casual, done to these fields will yield a massive fruit, in the present life, often immediately, that will be overwhelmingly disproportionate.

For instance, there is the famous case of a novice monk who was sent home because his Master knew (through samadhi) that his lifespan was to end in a week. However, the novice monk survived. His Master entered samadhi again and found out that on his way home, the novice monk had encountered an ant nest on the verge of being flooded, and quickly made an earth dam to redirect the water. This act of kindness to beings on the verge of disaster immediately extended his lifespan by a dozen years. There is also the recorded account (in the *Abhidharma-kosa*) of a Eunuch who was made whole again after buying and saving bulls from being castrated.

Another more recent example would be the case mentioned by a well known Buddhist, Upasaka Huang (known as Officer Huang as he is a retired police sergeant). What happened was that two sisters, in order to help their mother (who was unconscious from severe stroke), released life and gave a sincere offering, five times their monthly salaries, to two Sangha Monasteries (one for monks and another for nuns) that according to Upasaka Huang were the best in keeping the precepts in Taiwan, and dedicated the merit to their mother. **On the morning of the day after the offering had been made, their mother regained full consciousness.**

The third factor is the quickest and most powerful way to change destiny.

What is the absolute quickest way to change fate/destiny?

The above mentioned *third factor* is the quickest.

According to Chapter 4, verse 55–56 of the *Abhidharma-kosa*, a good deed or bad deed done to a “field of excellence” yields not only a great

fruit, but the reward or punishment will come imminently within the current life. Quickly overpowering any original fate.

In general, a “field of excellence” refers to recipients or causes made excellent by their spiritual attainments (i.e. the Buddha and Sangha — monks, nuns and cultivators of strict precepts and samadhi), or their severe and acute suffering (e.g. someone in desperate need).

Harm done to them will yield immediate retribution, but good done to them (i.e. charity and gifts) will yield immediate life changing rewards.

Thus, if we know a Sangha that is harmonious, true and strong in the precepts, we must immediately render support, offerings and respect. Moreover, if we know of beings or people in desperate need, on the verge of great suffering, we should likewise do our best to save them). The merits will speedily manifest, making a bad life good, and a good life even better.

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